

Easter 2B (Second Sunday of Easter, Year B)  
Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31  
April 19, 2009  
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Today's gospel reading is a particularly familiar one to all of us. In fact, we read today's gospel story each year the second Sunday of Easter. It is one of the few Sundays during the church year in which the Gospel reading remains the same whether we are in Year A, Year B, or Year C. It is that important a message.

In the Gospel reading, we hear of St. Thomas' doubts about the resurrection of the crucified Jesus Christ and of Jesus telling Thomas to place his hand on the wounds in Jesus' hand and in his side so that Thomas might believe. Perhaps you may recall Sunday school lessons from your childhood where you talked about Thomas' need to see and touch the wounds to believe and that as a result of that experience he then believed. Seeing is believing. But we also know from our Easter Gospel readings that seeing also does not always mean believing in what is truly accurate. You may recall that the Gospel reading for Easter told of Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, and John seeing the empty tomb and thus believing that Jesus' body had been stolen from the tomb. We all know that they believed at least for the moment in something that was not true, for we know the rest of the story, as you might say. But that is not the message of today's readings. No, for Thomas believes in the risen Christ as a result of seeing and touching the very wounds of Christ.

Yes. The story of St. Thomas is a familiar one—one learned many times through childhood Bible stories and again as adults. We know the message well about having faith in God and Jesus and how we can and should believe, without the need for other proof. A string of familiar sayings springs to mind. Seeing is believing. Oh ye of little faith. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

But I admit that I read and heard the gospel story anew as I prayed on the readings from Acts and the First Letter of John, which accompany the Gospel reading this year. I read and heard another message—one might even say another level to the story. And that is not Thomas' lack of faith or the story's focus on "seeing is believing" but instead on the reverse concept: "believing is seeing." Yes. That's right, believing is seeing. Faith is a matter of seeing God and Christ in the people whom we do and should serve and seeing God and Christ in the people who serve us and others.

It is not just by chance that we read these readings from Acts and the First Letter of John today as we also think about the Gospel reading. Each set of readings

from the three-year cycle for the Second Sunday of Easter uses the same Gospel text but combines it with a different set of other readings to offer a different vantage by which we might read and understand the Gospel text. So there is a special message that we are to receive this year and perhaps a different one from what we are to receive last year or even next year. But it goes beyond that simple observation. Perhaps you even noticed it as well. We had no Old Testament/ Hebrew Bible reading. Eastertide is the only time of the year during which the Sunday readings provide for a reading from the Acts of the Apostles instead of, not just as an alternative to the Hebrew Bible reading. Before last year, we had the option of reading either Acts or a Hebrew Bible reading, but the Revised Common Lectionary provides for only the Acts reading. Even then, however, it was common to have readings only from the New Testament. All of this caused me to reflect on that fact and reminded me that this season is really all about being reborn in and with the Good News of Christ. It is about our own resurrection. It is about being sent out as new ministers of Christ, proclaiming the Good News of Christ's resurrection in thought, word, and deed.

So, let's look at what I mean. Let's first look at the reading from the Acts of the Apostles. That reading starts in the middle of a story where Peter and John have just been imprisoned and questioned for speaking and preaching about the wonders of Jesus' resurrection. The council is unable to disprove what they are preaching, for all have seen it, but they are fearful of these two otherwise ordinary men—Peter and John—and what they preach. Unable to hold them any longer and admonishing them to stop their preaching, they are released. It is clear that Peter and John will continue to preach, and they return to their friends and followers. The group has just finished praying together, at which time the earth shakes. All of the people gathered are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking of God with boldness. And this is where today's reading from Acts begins.

The group of followers is referenced as a "group of those who believed." Now if that were not sufficiently powerful a statement, there is more. It continues to provide that, because they are believers and because of the great grace that they have received from Jesus Christ, they no longer claim private ownership in their possessions but own all things in common. They share what they have. They sell their individual possessions and bring the proceeds of the sales to the apostles to be distributed among those in need.

This speaks to a great testimony of faith. They no longer are concerned about what they might need or worry about whether they have enough or even think about whether they have more than another person. Their faith and trust are so great that they sell what they have to share in common with all others. They have such great

faith that they give up all that they personally own to serve and share with others. They see God and Jesus in the faces of their neighbors, and they have the faith to give away all that they have, to share in common.

In the First Letter of John, we again read of seeing and believing, touching and now also of hearing. For it says, “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” This reminds us of the Gospel reading’s story of St. Thomas’ encounters with the disciples and then later with Jesus. It speaks to the revelation of life through our senses and of our need to testify to what we have seen, heard, touched, and, more importantly, believe. Wow! Powerful stuff! Life is revealed through faith. We need to share our faith through testimony. We need to live our faith through Christian living. Again, believing is seeing, for we see Jesus in the faces of neighbors. We see Jesus in the faces of those serving neighbor.

We read the Gospel of John passage about St. Thomas and we get all caught up in whether Thomas was sufficiently faithful. Why did he doubt? Would I doubt? Would you doubt if you were Thomas. But isn’t it much more? Isn’t it also about how faith transforms us as followers, ministers, and servants of Christ? Isn’t it how faith transforms the way in which we look at and treat our neighbor?

Are we being reborn in Christ? . . . The Gospel of John speaks to Christ breathing on the disciples and how they are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is a passage very similar to the Genesis creation story, of God breathing life into humankind. The Gospel reading speaks of a breathing of new life into each of us. Perhaps the appropriate questions are: Can you see it? Can you see faith in others, in the way in which they treat one another? Can you see faith in the way in which you view your neighbor? Can you see faith in yourself, in the way that you act, see, touch, and interact in the world? It is a matter of seeing the transformation to us and to others as a result of the resurrection. How does the resurrection transform the way in which I live and in the way in which I see God and Christ in my neighbor?

Tough questions, I will agree. But perhaps surrendering to faith is the key. Surrendering to faith and having our eyes and hearts opened to all that we can and should be. Surrendering to the transformation to us and thus to the world.

As you continue to ponder that further, I wish to offer you a prayer. It is a prayer from the *Moravian Daily Texts* for Easter Monday, as I find that it reflects much of what today’s readings say about seeing and believing.

Let us pray. Loving God, do we see your goodness in our daily lives? Open our eyes that we may see your love demonstrated in those who feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, assist the destitute, and share your life-giving message. Amen.

Prayer is reprinted from *Moravian Daily Texts 2009: A Devotional Guide for Every Day*.  
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